

Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

www.iowadnr.com

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FINDING FLATHEADS

By Joe Wilkinson
Iowa Department of Natural Resources

The water was high and the current fast, as we pointed our boat into a bend in the Iowa River. “Fish on,” called out Royce Bowman, catching sight of the twitching bank pole. I gunned the motor to keep it in place against the current, as Bowman reached into the water. A nice three-pound flathead catfish was on the business end. The catfish went into our tub. The bank pole—a home-concocted PVC pipe, re-rod, inner tube strip, heavy line and heavy-duty hook and metal clamp—went into the bottom of the boat.

“This spot is about ten feet deep; an outside bend, directly between three or four large brush piles,” pointed out Bowman, when I asked him ‘why here.’ “There’s a nice calm spot for the bait to sit.” Working upstream from Hills, we checked and then pulled the remaining poles and trotlines, in a five-mile stretch of the Iowa River. A flathead here, a channel catfish there; no mother lode today, but the lines had been good earlier in the week. “We caught a 56-pounder earlier. There were a couple 40s, too,” Bowman offered.

The fish, though, went right back into the river. The Iowa River route is part of a study to document how many flatheads—and what sizes—are in segments of the Iowa, Cedar and North Raccoon rivers in Iowa. “We started the study in response to angler concerns that they weren’t seeing as many big flathead catfish anymore,” explains Department of Natural Resources fisheries biologist Greg Gellwicks. He and Greg Simmons were about an hour behind us, pulling up submerged hoop nets in the same stretch. “We don’t know much about flatheads. They are difficult to sample,” said Gellwicks.

I could see why. Flatheads get big---up to 100 pounds in Iowa---because they hang out in spots that humans have a hard time reaching. They'll sit in holes just outside the fast current; current that pushes downed trees and limbs into tricky, half-out-of-the-water brushpiles. Nudging the boat into the bank was one thing. Holding it there was another. A mistake and one of us could be dangling in the water with heavy line and a hook twisted around an arm, while the boat swept downstream. On this day, we discovered that if Bowman maneuvered the boat, I could retrieve the lines with only a little trouble. Yet, he frequently works *alone*, doing both ends of the operation.

Before each fish was returned to the river, it had to be 'processed'. Bowman injected a tiny VI (visual implant) tag under the wide, ugly tongue of the catfish. And looking down the slippery, sloped head at the *inside* of a flathead's mouth is not a pretty sight to begin with. A piece of the pectoral fin was snipped, to be examined later, to age the fish. The adipose fin was clipped to indicate that it had already been tagged, if recaptured. Each fish is weighed and measured to help build an information base. As researchers come back in the years ahead, they can determine how the population is doing by how many flatheads they can catch—especially the infrequent recaptures.

"Flatheads are a top predator in our streams. They eat live fish; they don't scavenge for food like channel cats," emphasizes Gellwicks. "They are important to the health of the river ecosystem; to what other fish are found in there. (Plus) they can get up over 100 pounds. They cause a lot of excitement for anglers, too."

The hoop nets held a few more nice fish. A pair in one net went about 12 and 15 pounds. This week, the crew will return with electroshocking equipment. "There have been other studies where they felt they weren't getting the big fish effectively (by shocking)," explains Gellwicks. "They get a lot of little fish with it. We are using the lines and nets to see how many big fish we get, compared to electrofishing in the same areas." They will also sample at different times of the year, with different river flows for the same reason.

As the study wraps up, it might suggest adjustments in regulations, habitat improvement or even that everything is fine; no changes needed.

The research moves up and down the Iowa River corridor to spread out the data. Multiple sites on the Cedar and North Raccoon rivers are being studied, too. "This fall, we will follow up with some radio telemetry, to follow individual fish throughout the year; to see where their critical habitat is; how much they move in a year's time," says Gellwicks. That year-round information is important. River anglers might not worry about where that big cat spends the nearly dormant winter months. If those winter areas are threatened or reduced, it would have a big impact on fishing and the well-being of the river system.

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POPULAR OUTDOOR SKILLS WORKSHOP SET FOR SEPTEMBER

GUTHRIE CENTER - It is time for women to answer their "call of the wild" by participating in the 11th annual Becoming an Outdoors-Woman (BOW) workshop Sept. 10-12. The workshop is aimed primarily at women, but is an opportunity for anyone 18 years or older to learn outdoor skills usually associated with hunting and fishing, but useful for many outdoor pursuits. The workshop is held at the Springbrook Conservation Education Center in Guthrie County.

"There is a good selection of classes open for this year's workshop," said Julie Sparks, DNR Becoming an Outdoors-Woman coordinator. "We have a wonderful group of instructors, our class sizes are kept small and the setting at Springbrook is beautiful, particularly in the fall. The BOW workshop is an excellent opportunity for women to try a wide variety of activities they may never have had the chance to experience."

Workshop topics include basic fishing, muzzleloading, fly fishing, birdwatching, archery, nature photography, beginning shotgun shooting, basic motor boat skills, orienteering and map reading, canoeing, kayaking, camping, Dutch oven cooking, bird dog basics, wild edibles, backpacking and much more. The cost is \$135, which covers food, lodging and materials for the weekend workshop. The registration fee will go to \$165 after Aug. 27.

Registration forms are now available online at www.iowadnr.com. Click on the Becoming an Outdoors-Woman logo on the home page and download the six-page registration information/form. Forms can also be received by contacting Julie Sparks, Becoming an Outdoors-Woman, Iowa DNR, Wallace State Office Building, 502 E. 9th St., Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0034; phone 515-281-6159 or email at julie.sparks@dnr.state.ia.us.

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IOWA FISHING REPORT **For the week of July 27, 2004** **www.iowadnr.com**

For current information on fishing conditions for your lake or area, contact the office in that district. Phone numbers are listed with each district report.

Northeast

Mississippi River Pools 9 to 15: The water temperature at Guttenberg is 81 degrees and the clarity is good with slightly dropping water levels. With the stable water conditions, fishing has been fantastic in most areas. Take some time off and enjoy fishing on the Mississippi River. Bluegills are biting well in **Pools 9 to 11**. Some bluegills have moved out to the areas between shore and around the wing dams. A small jig tipped with a minnow or worm is the lure of choice for this hungry panfish. Concentrate near rocky outcroppings or spillway areas for best results. Good numbers of bluegills are also being taken in backwater lakes such as Lansing Big Lake (**Pool 9**) and Methodist/Norwegian and Bussey lakes (**Pool 10**). Freshwater drum fishing is excellent using a simple sliding sinker and worm in **Pools 9 to 11**. Drum can be found in nearly any area with moderate current such as the main channel borders, wing dams, side channels or tailwater areas below the dams. There are several pull-off fishing areas in the Marquette/McGregor area where drum can be caught off the bank. Channel catfishing has also been good using stink bait. In **Pool 9**, try areas near New Albin in Minnesota Slough. In **Pool 10**, channel catfish are being caught in Harpers Slough near Harpers Ferry. In **Pool 11**, try fishing for hungry cats in Jack Oak Slough near Cassville, Wis. White bass, largemouth bass and smallmouth bass are also on feeding frenzies throughout **Pools 9 to 11**. Fish small spinners or crankbaits along rocky banks for the best action. Walleyes and even some sauger are being caught off wing dams in **Pool 11** and in large side channels in **Pools 9 to 10**. Many anglers are using a worm harness with a night crawler for walleyes. When fishing wing dam areas for walleyes, concentrate on the upstream side of the wing dam for best success. Water level at Bellevue is 5.8 feet and dropping. The temperature is 76 degrees. Freshwater drum fishing is excellent on night crawlers fished along side sloughs and the main channel border around the wing dams in **Pools 12 to 15**. Channel catfish are good in **Pools 12 to 15** using cheese or stink (dip) baits fished in areas with current—move to find fish. Walleye fishing is good using night crawlers, leeches and crankbaits fished next to the wing dams. Largemouth bass are hitting top-water lures and spinner baits fished in the backwater sloughs and main channel borders around woody structure, vegetation and off of rocks in **Pools 12 to 15**. Bluegill fishing is good in a wide range of areas in **Pools 12 to 15** including brush piles, rocky shorelines or vegetation in the side sloughs or along the main channel borders. Smallmouth bass are good in **Pools 12 to 13** on crankbaits fished along rocky shorelines.

Upper Iowa River (Howard and Winneshiek): Fishing is good for smallmouth bass using dark colored jigs.

Cedar (Bremer and Black Hawk), **Shell Rock** (Butler, Bremer and Black Hawk), **Wapsipinicon** (Buchanan), and **Maquoketa rivers** (Delaware): Channel catfish are hitting worms and chicken liver. Walleye fishing is fair to good on jigs tipped with a night crawler. Smallmouth bass are biting on jigs tipped with a piece of night crawler.

Channel catfish are actively feeding in many of the smaller feeder streams to the major rivers. Some good creeks to try in Black Hawk County include **West Fork Cedar River, Beaver Creek and Black Hawk Creek**.

Meyer Lake (Winneshiek): Bluegill fishing is good on night crawlers.

Volga Lake (Fayette): Fishing is good for bluegill using a night crawler suspended under a bobber.

Lake Hendricks (Howard): Bluegill fishing is good on night crawlers. Channel catfish are good on chicken liver or night crawlers.

Trout fishing is excellent and streams are clear and fishable. During the busy vacation season, anglers are reminded to try the unannounced streams to *get away from it all*. At this time of year, Bloody Run, Glovers and Grannis Creek are being stocked twice each week, with one of the stockings announced and one unannounced. North Bear, South Bear, Trout River and Wexford are also being stocked weekly on an unannounced basis. Twice during the month, Clear, Coon, Hickory, Little Mill, Little Turkey and the upper section of the Maquoketa River will receive unannounced stockings of trout. These streams offer anglers an excellent opportunity to fish for trout any day of the week. For current trout stocking information on other northeast Iowa trout streams, call the trout stocking hotline at 563-927-5736. You can also access the proposed trout stocking calendar through the Internet at www.iowadnr.com and go to the fish and fishing web pages.

For information on fishing in northeast Iowa, call the regional office in Manchester at 563-927-3276.

Northwest

Spirit Lake (Dickinson): Walleye fishing has slowed. Anglers are still catching fish using jigs and spinner rigs in Angler's Bay, Cottonwood Point, Big Stoney Point and along Buffalo Run through Marble Beach. Smallmouth and largemouth bass fishing continues to be good. Yellow perch fishing is good at the south end of the pump house and the south end of Angler's Bay. Fish from mid morning to mid afternoon. Most of the perch caught are between 9 and 10 inches. Crappies and bluegills are being caught while fishing for perch on some of the shallower rock piles with vegetation nearby. Muskie fishing is starting to pick up with a few nice fish caught on the south end.

West Okoboji (Dickinson): Fishing is good for big bluegills in 8 to 16 feet of water. Try using an ice fishing jig tipped with a garden worm. Remember to keep the bait on the small side for bluegills. Smaller gills are being caught around docks. Smallmouth bass action continues to be good. Most fish are being caught over the rock piles.

East Okoboji (Dickinson): Anglers are catching nice stringers or channel catfish on traditional baits.

Little Sioux River (Buena Vista and Clay): Channel catfish fishing is good throughout the river system.

Lake Pahoja (Lyon): A few channel catfish are being caught towards the evening using traditional baits.

Willow Creek (Osceola): Anglers are catching largemouth bass along the vegetation using top-water baits.

Storm Lake (Buena Vista): Fishing is fair for channel catfish using stink bait, night crawlers and shrimp either drifting in a boat or fishing from shore. Anglers are catching white bass and walleyes at the inlet area and off Starr Park.

Black Hawk Lake (Sac): Channel catfish fishing is fair. Anglers have been successful drifting skinned chubs and fishing with night crawlers in the inlet area.

North Twin Lake (Calhoun): Anglers are catching a few big bluegills on small jigs and wax worms.

Brushy Creek (Webster): Bluegills are biting on wax worms or a piece of worm. Try for large fish in deeper water. Bass can be found around weed beds or by submerged trees. Plastic lures have been working well. Channel catfish can be caught throughout the lake using traditional baits. Walleye fishing is best early or late using leeches.

Clear Lake (Cerro Gordo): Walleye fishing is fair. Jig fishing with live bait on the rock reefs and near the north shore rushes is working best. Remember the 14-inch minimum length limit. White bass are being caught from docks and around reefs. Channel catfish are biting on chicken liver and dead chubs. Fish along the north shore rushes and the Ventura Grade. Bullheads are hitting on night crawlers fish near the bottom.

Beeds Lake (Franklin): Crappie fishing is fair. The fish are suspended in the main basin. Drift or troll small jigs to locate fish. Shore anglers should fish from the end of the jetties for crappies. Anglers are finding most crappies are 7 to 9 inches.

Lake Cornelia (Wright): Yellow perch fishing is fair to good for 8 to 10-inch fish. Fish the north end with night crawlers or minnows. Channel catfish are hitting on night crawlers, chicken liver and stink bait. Fishing is good for 7 to 10-inch bullhead using night crawlers.

East Fork Des Moines River (Kossuth): Channel catfish fishing is fair on chicken liver and stink bait.

Boone River (Hamilton): Smallmouth bass are hitting jigs and crankbaits. Channel catfish can be caught on stink bait and chicken liver.

Briggs Woods Lake (Hamilton): Channel catfish fishing is best on chicken liver. Crappie fishing is good using small jigs and minnows. Crappies are running 5 to 8 inches with an occasional larger fish.

Little Wall Lake (Hamilton): Anglers are catching small crappies using small jigs and minnows. Channel catfish fishing is good using stink bait and chicken liver.

For more information on fishing in northwest Iowa, call the regional office in Spirit Lake at 712-336-1840.

Southwest

Viking (Montgomery): Crappie and bluegill fishing is fair using jigs tipped with night crawler or minnow in 6 to 8 feet of water. Channel catfish fishing is good using liver. Largemouth bass fishing has picked up in the evening around structure.

Cold Springs (Cass): Fishing is fair for crappies around the aerators. Channel catfish fishing is good.

Manawa (Pottawattamie): Fishing is excellent for channel catfish on Boy Scout Island. Walleyes are being caught on the west shore along the rocks.

Orient (Adair): Channel catfish are fair in evenings using liver.

Greenfield (Adair): Channel catfish are good toward evening.

Mormon Trail (Adair): Walleye fishing is good using crankbaits or jigs. The 7 to 9-inch crappies can be caught using minnows in 6 to 8 feet of water. Fishing is good for largemouth bass and bluegills. Channel catfish are good using night crawlers or liver.

Prairie Rose (Shelby): Fishing is fair for 7-inch crappies in 6 to 8 feet of water using jigs and minnows around rocks and woody structure. Bass fishing is good. Anglers are catching channel catfish on liver.

DeSoto Bend (Harrison): Walleye and crappie fishing is fair. Walleyes being harvested are 15 to 16 inches. Anglers also are catching good numbers of largemouth bass. Carp are being caught near shore.

Littlefield Lake (Audubon): Fishing is fair for large bluegills drifting with night crawlers. Channel catfish fishing is good.

Willow (Harrison): Largemouth Bass fishing is fair in the evenings around structure. Bluegills are good along weed edges. Channel Catfish are being caught in the evenings using chicken liver.

Southwest Iowa Farm Ponds: Channel catfish, bluegill and largemouth bass fishing is good. Remember to ask permission and clean up after yourself.

Big Creek (Polk): Channel catfish fishing has been good using night crawlers and cut and stink baits. Bluegill fishing has slowed although fish 8 inches or larger are common. Largemouth bass fishing has been fair, with most below the legal length limit.

Lake Ahquabi (Warren): Channel catfish fishing is good with cut and stink baits. Bluegill and redear sunfish fishing has been fair to good using jigs or hook/bobber combination with worms and wax worms. Largemouth bass fishing is fair, although most fish are sub-legal.

Hooper Lake (Warren): Bluegill fishing has been fair using worms and jigs. Largemouth bass fishing has been fair using buzzbaits and surface lures.

Hickory Grove (Story): Bluegill fishing is good using worms. Channel catfish fishing is good on night crawlers and largemouth bass fishing has been fair to good using top-water and buzzbaits. Crappie fishing is good in deeper water, although fishing is spotty.

Don Williams (Boone): Channel catfish are good to excellent using night crawlers and chicken liver. Crappie fishing has been fair using minnows and jigs with most fish caught in deeper water. Bluegill fishing has been slow. Largemouth bass fishing has been fair on surface plugs and crankbaits.

Rock Creek Lake (Jasper): Channel catfish fishing has been good along the shorelines and shallow water. Crappie fishing is slow using mini-jigs with yellow skirts, although fish have moved to deeper water.

Easter Lake (Polk): Channel catfish fishing is good with most caught on night crawlers and stink baits. Bluegills in the 5 to 6-inch range have been hitting well over the past week. Crappie fishing has been slow to fair, with jigs and minnows. Largemouth bass fishing has been slow, with the best catches along the face of the dam.

Red Rock (Marion): White bass fishing is excellent in various areas of the reservoir. Channel catfish fishing has been fair, with the better areas in bays and coves.

Red Rock tailwater (Marion): Channel catfish fishing has been good using traditional baits, and a few nice walleye have been caught. White bass fishing has been good in the tailwater using jigs and minnows.

Roberts Creek (Marion): Crappie fishing has been fair to good using jigs with minnows and/or night crawlers and channel catfish have been hitting on night crawlers.

Saylorville Lake (Polk): White bass fishing has been good to excellent trolling crankbaits and shore fishing casting small spoons. Channel catfish fishing has been good with traditional baits, with one of the better areas in the spillway outlet from Big Creek Lake. Crappie fishing has been fair using jigs/minnows.

Saylorville Lake tailwater/river (Polk): White bass and channel catfish fishing has been good below Saylorville Reservoir. Flathead catfish fishing is fair with some nice fish reported from the tailwater of Saylorville.

Three Mile (Union): Channel catfish are being caught with liver. Some crappies are in 8 to 14 feet of water.

Twelve Mile (Union): Fishing for channel catfish is good using night crawlers or liver. Some walleyes are being caught using leeches.

Icaria (Adams): Fishing is good for catfish using liver.

Green Valley (Union): Channel catfish can be caught in the bays using dip baits and liver.

Little River (Decatur): Catfish can be caught in the bays using liver or night crawlers. Some walleyes are being taken.

West Lake Osceola (Clarke): Channel catfish fishing is good using liver.

Fogle Lake (Ringgold): Some bluegill can be caught near the ramp or around the jetties. Channel catfish can be caught in the rocks or shallow bays. The lake is currently being lowered to improve fish growth but is still accessible for fishing

For more information on fishing in southwest Iowa, call the regional office in Lewis at 712-769-2587.

Southeast

Mississippi River Pools 16 to 19: Fishing on the Mississippi River Pools 16 to 19 has been good. The water temperature at Lock and Dam 16 (Muscatine) is 75 degrees and the river pool stage is 11.06 and is expected to drop over the next week. **Pools 16 to 19:** Fishing for channel catfish continues to be up and down. Catfish have been biting on a variety of baits: dip baits, night crawlers, shrimp, shad and leeches. Bluegill and crappie fishing continues to be fair to good in backwater areas on jigs tipped with minnows and worms or bobber rigs. Walleye and sauger fishing has slowed down some from last week. Look for walleye and sauger below wing dams and in deeper holes using jigs, crankbaits, and minnows. **Pool 17:** The Big Timber area has been good for crappie and bluegill fishing.

Lake Darling (Washington): Catfishing has been fair to good at dusk. Concentrate your efforts along the campground island and along the southeast shoreline between the beach and the campground. The catfish are spending the day in the creek channel and moving up into the shallow water to feed at about dark.

Lake Belva Deer (Keokuk): Bluegill fishing has finally slowed down. Or maybe it was the 90-degree heat followed by a 20-degree temperature drop last week. Anglers are catching some nice 2-pound catfish on stink bait around the rock in the deeper water.

Lake Odessa (Louisa): The lake is quickly being dropped to the summer draw down level in an attempt to get some vegetation to grow for the fall waterfowl migration. Crappie fishing dropped off last week probably due to the weather. When the weather stabilizes again look for the crappie to be in the trees in Sand Run. You probably won't be able to get to Yankee Chute without using a small Jon boat.

Lake Rathbun (Appanoose): Walleyes have been hitting night crawlers or crankbaits trolled or drifted along the rocky points and underwater reefs. The Island

View area has been one of the better spots. Crappies have been hitting minnows fished in deeper water. Channel catfish have been hitting on night crawlers and stink baits.

Lake Sugema (Van Buren): Largemouth bass have been hitting in the evenings. Bluegills have been biting on small jigs tipped with a piece of night crawler.

Lake Miami (Monroe): Bluegills have been hitting on small jigs fished in the standing timber. Largemouth bass have been biting on artificial lures. Fishing from a boat has produced better results than fishing from shore.

Lake Wapello (Davis): Largemouth bass have been hitting in the rocks along the dam on plastic worms and spinner baits. Shoreline structure, such as sunken trees or pallet, has been the best areas. Bluegills have been hitting on small jigs fished around the lily pads.

Coralville Reservoir (Johnson): Some channel catfish are being caught on dead shad and crawdads.

Diamond Lake (Poweshiek): Fishing is good for channel catfish on night crawlers, and bluegills are being caught on small worms. Look for the bluegills around structure and on the weed lines.

Iowa Lake (Iowa): Bluegills have been biting on small worms.

Kent Park (Johnson): Bluegills continue to be caught on worms. The channel catfish bite is good early and late in the day on chicken liver and night crawlers. Anglers are catching some 10 to 14-inch bass on various lures and live bait.

Lake Macbride (Johnson): Some crappies are being caught on jig/minnows around the deeper brush piles.

Pleasant Creek (Linn): Perch fishing is excellent using worms under bobbers. Channel catfish are biting on stink bait, chicken liver and night crawlers on the bottom. Largemouth bass fishing has been good on live or artificial baits. Best catches tend to be around rocks, such as the jetties and the dam. Remember there is an 18-inch minimum length limit on largemouth at Pleasant Creek.

Iowa River (Washington and Louisa): The river is still falling; however the water being released from Coralville is keeping it from being too drastic of a drop. Catfishing has been hit and miss. Minnows and stink bait seem to be producing the most fish.

Skunk River (Washington): Last week's up and down weather had slowed the fishing but a more stable weather pattern, at least for early this week, should get the catfish back on the feed. Creek chubs and stink bait are the best bets. Flatheads are being taken on sunfish and bullheads.

Cedar River (Louisa.): Catfishing is fair to good. Look for the catfish along the high cut banks where the males are still guarding the young and along the brush piles in the deeper water for the females.

Wapsipinicon River (Linn): Channel catfish are being caught on night crawlers and stink bait. Some walleyes are also being caught on a jig/minnow.

For more information on fishing in southeast Iowa, call the regional office in Brighton at 319-694-2430.

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